

# United Kingdom

- The UK has seen a considerable amount of multi-stakeholder policy development in recent decades, with landmarks including the Home Secretary's Taskforce for Child Protection on the Internet (2006-8), The Byron Review: Children and New Technology (2008) and the establishment of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (chaired by Home Office/Department for Education) in 2008. With multiple work strands, an annual summit for all stakeholders, a strong strategy statement, and an active Evidence Group, the UK has seen concerted progress in this domain.
- Nonetheless, the EU Kids Online findings reveal that, by comparison with other European countries, the UK is distinctive in several respects, and from this we may draw out some policy recommendations.
- EU Kids Online has categorised the UK as a 'high use, some risk' country, an improvement on previous findings which identified it as 'high use, high risk'. It seems that the above efforts are bearing fruit, with risk estimates for UK children both lower than in several other European countries and also fairly low in absolute terms. This should not be grounds for complacency, however, for it shows the level of effort required to reduce risk exposure among children. The EU Kids Online findings also reveal where new risks are emerging – notably, the UK is among the highest for estimates of excessive internet use, so new efforts are required.
- The UK is noteworthy in the very high proportion of children who access the internet at school, making the school a particularly appropriate setting for the delivery of digital literacy skills, including but not only internet safety skills. Since the importance accorded to this task in UK schools, especially primary schools (vital as ever younger children go online) is in some doubt, this should be a priority for all UK schools. It is positive, therefore, that most UK children, more than in many other countries, say their teachers have guided them in internet use.
- UK children are more likely than many to go online via a mobile or handheld device, putting them in the vanguard of new risks associated with personal internet access and, equally, making protective oversight by their parents more difficult.
- Social networking use in the UK is distinctive insofar as the UK has many 9-12 year olds who put a false age on their (usually Facebook) profile, but most children report having their privacy settings set to 'private'. However, UK children have more online contacts than most, including some that are not known to them face to face.
- Levels of parental mediation of children's internet use are fairly high, as for the rest of Europe, with the UK distinctive mainly in that half of children use computers with some filtering software installed. Since this has been a focus of safety promotions, it represents a success for such initiatives, though still half of children do not have such filtering software installed. There are differing views about filtering across Europe, however, with concerns about both government intervention and restrictive software meaning that not all favour this strategy.
- In planning for risk management, it must be borne in mind that risk reduction is not always an optimal strategy – children encounter a fair number of risks that, at least as they see it, are not problematic, upsetting or harmful. Although addressing levels of risk remains important, it is the case that children learn to cope by encountering some degree of risk and, it seems, many do cope successfully – at least if one takes seriously children's accounts of whether online risk results in being upset or harmed.